



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region 2
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804
November 3, 2011

Dear Interested Citizens:

Thank you for your thoughtful reviews and comments on a proposal by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to accept the donation of 68 acres of wildlife habitat adjoining Calf Creek Wildlife Management Area in Ravalli County.

Enclosed is a decision document in which FWP explains its rationale for recommending that the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and the State Board of Land Commissioners approve this transaction as proposed. Upon completion of the public involvement process, FWP accepts the draft environmental assessment (EA), socio-economic assessment, and management plan as final. The decision document also summarizes all public comments on the proposed acquisition, and explains how FWP considered and incorporated these comments in formulating a recommendation.

FWP will request approval for its acceptance of the subject lands at the monthly Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission meeting scheduled for November 10, 2011, at the FWP Wild Education Center (2668 Broadwater) in Helena. FWP will request approval from the State Board of Land Commissioners at its regularly scheduled meeting in November, also in Helena. These meetings are open to the public, as are other regularly scheduled Commission and Land Board meetings.

Please feel free to contact me at 406-542-5500 with any questions you may have. Thank you for your interest and participation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mack Long", is written over a horizontal line.

Mack Long
Regional Supervisor

DECISION NOTICE
FWP Acceptance of Fee-title to a 68-Acre Addition to the
Calf Creek Wildlife Management Area
November 3, 2011

Proposal

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposed to accept the donation of fee-title ownership of approximately 68 acres adjoining Calf Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Ravalli County, northeast of Hamilton. Calf Creek WMA was acquired by FWP for elk winter range in 1960, and currently consists of 2,333 acres. The proposed 68-acre addition shares almost ½-mile of common boundary with the WMA, and would add a ¼-mile buffer from adjoining developed and further developable private lands. This donation is offered by Ms. Christopher Young, the owner of the subject parcel, with the intent that the gift be accomplished by the end of 2011.

The 68-acre parcel is a historically grazed pasture of native and non-native grasses, and is non-forested. FWP currently maintains the fence between the two properties, and would simply transfer that effort to the new boundary upon acquisition. The primary benefit of acquiring this property would be an enhanced ability to manage public access during open and closed periods on the WMA, and the ability to avoid subdivision and development in a location where impacts from development would be significant on wildlife habitat. The property would be open to non-motorized access from April 15 through December 1, along with the rest of Calf Creek WMA.

Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Process

FWP prepared a draft environmental assessment (EA) pursuant to MEPA, and a management plan and socio-economic assessment pursuant to the 1987 act of the Montana Legislature known as House Bill 526. FWP mailed approximately 33 copies of the EA (and approximately 48 email notifications of the EA's availability) to adjacent landowners and interested individuals, groups and agencies. The EA was available for public review on FWP's web site (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>, "Submit Public Comments") from September 13 through October 14, 2011.

Legal notice of the Calf Creek WMA Acquisition EA (Appendix A) was published twice each in the following newspapers: *Bitterroot Star* (Stevensville; Sept 14 & 21), *Independent Record* (Helena; Sept 12 & 26), *Missoulian* (Sept 12 & 26), and *Ravalli Republic* (Hamilton; Sept 12 & 26). A news story regarding the proposed acquisition and public meeting was published in the *Missoulian* and *Ravalli Republic* newspapers on September 26.

A public hearing to explain the project, answer questions, and take public comment was held on September 28 (7:00 p.m. in Hamilton at the US Forest Service headquarters), and 6 members of the public attended.

Summary of Public Comment

FWP received 10 written comments regarding the acquisition: 8 comments represented a total of 9 people (including 1 anonymous), and 2 comments were from groups (Bitterroot Backcountry

Horsemen and Corvallis High School's Classroom Without Walls). All written comments supported the acquisition.

Six (6) people offered public testimony at the public hearing, and all were in support of the acquisition. Testimony at the public hearing included three neighboring landowners (representing 2 parcels), the Ravalli County Fish and Wildlife Association, and Corvallis High School's Classroom Without Walls.

No comments in opposition were received. No concerns were raised that would bring the environmental analysis into question, and the draft EA is therefore accepted as final.

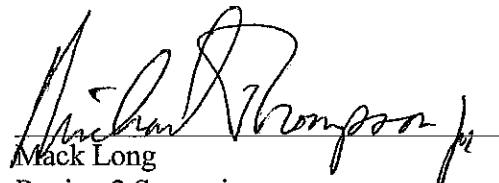
Hearing notes and written comments are preserved on file at FWP Region 2 Headquarters at 3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula 59804. Generally, comments were in support of protecting elk habitat and open space, and providing non-motorized recreation. The public hearing provided an opportunity for FWP and neighbors to begin a dialogue and cooperation on fence maintenance and management to reduce damage from elk crossing. The Classroom Without Walls program emphasized past and planned outdoor educational opportunities centered at Calf Creek WMA.

Participants in the public hearing discussed ways to appropriately recognize the gift of public land being made by Ms. Christopher Young.

Regional Supervisor's recommendation on FWP's acceptance of the donated addition to Calf Creek WMA

The addition of this 68 acres will add important contiguous elk habitat to the Calf WMA, and conserve a relic native sagebrush-grassland of importance to a variety of wildlife. This addition fits ideally for opening new and valued public access opportunities on the WMA, and will allow the opportunity to remove existing fence for the benefit of wildlife and recreation. The land and vegetation are in good condition and will not increase FWP's overall maintenance burden. In fact, this acquisition will prevent more costly management costs that would be expected in the event that the land was to be subdivided and developed in the future. Neighboring landowners—some in formal testimony and others in informal conversations—have stepped forward to offer their support and cooperation toward incorporating the property into public ownership.

In light of these considerations, I am pleased to recommend that FWP accept the donation of the 68 acres adjoining Calf Creek WMA, with an expression of gratitude to Ms. Christopher Young for her generous gift to Montana.


Mack Long
Region 2 Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

11/3/11
Date

Appendix A

Legal Notice for the Proposed Calf Creek WMA Addition

PUBLIC COMMENT SOUGHT

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) invites public review of its proposal to accept the donation of approximately 68 acres of private land adjoining the Calf Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA), 7 miles east of Hamilton in Ravalli County. The WMA addition would protect elk winter range and improve public access. A draft environmental assessment (EA) has been prepared for this proposal. The EA may be viewed on FWP's Internet website <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("Submit Public Comments," beginning September 12).

The EA may be obtained by mail from Region 2 FWP, 3201 Spurgin Rd., Missoula 59804; by phoning 406-542-5540; or by emailing shrose@mt.gov. Comments may also be directed to Sharon Rose by mail, phone or email at these contacts. Comments must be received by FWP no later than 5:00 p.m. on October 11, 2011.

FWP will hold a public hearing in Hamilton on September 28th, Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. at the US Forest Service headquarters (1801 N 1st Street) to discuss the proposal and take public comment.